

The Discovery of the Lost Ark of the Covenant

Amateur archaeologist Ron Wyatt claims to have found the long-lost Ark of the Covenant, but his attempts to retrieve this ancient relic have been hindered by political difficulties.

by Jonathan Gray ©1997

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For 800 years the Ark of the Covenant was the most sacred and holy object in the world. Suddenly, in 586 BC, it disappeared. It was not until 1982 that its location was determined. The discovery is so electrifying and so politically explosive that the news has been kept secret for over 15 years. Even today, at the request of the host government, not all of the evidence can be revealed.

In 1982, American amateur archaeologist Ron Wyatt claimed to have found the Ark of the Covenant, but he did not make his claim widely known. In fact, Ron had only told a few of his friends before the host government requested that he keep certain information confidential for the time being.

So well was the secret kept that it was not until 1991 that I learned of Ron's claimed discovery. With three decades of experience as an archaeological explorer as well as a sceptic, I set out with a briefcase full of objections against Wyatt's claims.

My team was to spend four years investigating the alleged discovery of the Ark of the Covenant. I expected to disprove Ron Wyatt's claims quickly; however, after intense investigation, repeated visits to dig sites and privileged viewing of evidence and artefacts, I was left totally convinced of the truth of the find. The result is the 600-page book, *Ark of the Covenant* [see review, last issue].

What follows is the story of this hugely significant discovery, according to my thorough investigation. It is a story that could not be told until 1997, 15 years after the fact.

One important note before we go on. Due to continuing restrictions put in place by the host government, it is not possible to present all the data that has been collected on this subject. For most people, that which *can* be said in this report will be more than enough. Others will have to watch and wait until that time when the ultimate evidence can be made public.

ON THE TRACK OF THE LOST ARK

According to historical records the Ark of the Covenant was constructed at the time of Moses, in the year 1446 BC, for the purpose of enshrining the Ten Commandments. These Commandments were called "the Words of the Covenant", hence the chest that contained them was called "the Ark of the Covenant". The Hebrew word "ark" in this context means "box".

The Ark was a wooden chest plated in gold. The lid was made of solid gold, and two statues of cherubim, one at each side, were also of solid gold. It is written in the Old Testament that the design was handed down by God. The Ark was revered by the Hebrews and people of surrounding nations who heard of supernatural events associated with it. Quite suddenly, however, the Ark disappeared from historical records.

Long before I got involved, there were speculations that the lost Ark was hidden anywhere from Ethiopia to Jordan to Ireland. There have been numerous attempts to find the secret hiding place of this famous treasure—many of them since the 1981 release of the Hollywood fantasy, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The real thing had vanished at least 2,500 years ago. Its disappearance, according to some people, was *the* great mystery.

Well, my investigations had led me into numerous localities in a number of countries, but I was satisfied that the Ark had not gone to any of these places, that it had not been taken by the Babylonians or the Romans, and that it had not been destroyed.

According to tradition, the Ark and other Temple treasures remained hidden throughout the time of the Babylonian invasions, the 70-year exile of the Jews in Babylonia, and the entire Second Temple period. They remained hidden throughout the centuries while Jerusalem was under foreign domination, and they remain hidden to the present day.



The cliff-face near Mount Moriah, sometimes called the "Skull Hill" escarpment.

WYATT'S THEORY ON THE ARK'S HIDING PLACE

In October 1978 began a story that could yet prove to be the most significant event in modern history. American amateur archaeologist Ron Wyatt, who at the time was researching his ideas on the location of Noah's Ark, developed a theory on the location of the long-lost Ark of the Covenant.

Ron Wyatt believed that the golden Ark would be found in Jerusalem, beneath old Mount Moriah in the vicinity of the cliff-face that is sometimes called the "Skull Hill" escarpment, since it contains the "Skull Face" that many Christians believe was where Yeshua (Jesus) was crucified.

Ron's theory was not without basis. A study of historical records revealed that:



Ron Wyatt in the excavation trench in front of the Calvary escarpment.

1) The Ark vanished between the 18th year of King Josiah (when it is recorded as having been moved back to King Solomon's Temple) and 35 years later at the siege of Jerusalem when the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians.

2) The Ark was not recorded as one of the items seized and taken to Babylon.

3) It is likely that the Ark was hidden just prior to the destruction of the Temple.

4) To have escaped seizure, the Ark would have to have been hidden outside the city, but it would have been impossible for the Hebrews to get the Ark out of the city while it was surrounded by the Babylonian army. However, it may have been possible for them to have secreted the Ark just outside the city, somewhere in the 'no man's land' between the opposing forces of the Hebrews and Babylonians.

Although never previously suspected, it was conceivable that the Ark of the Covenant could have been hidden in the vicinity that Wyatt had chosen.

SITE EXCAVATION BEGINS

In January 1979 Ron Wyatt and his team began excavation in Jerusalem. Given the broad nature of the clues, they had little idea where to commence digging.

The site that Wyatt selected was being used as a rubbish dump and offered very little promise visually. There was so much rubbish in front of the hill that several truckloads had to be carted away before digging could begin. Over the millennia, the city of Jerusalem had been razed and rebuilt several times. Each time, a new city was simply constructed on top of the old.

As the Ark of the Covenant was last seen over 2,500 years ago, Ron decided initially to dig straight down along the cliff-face, much of which was covered with built-up rubble.

Many tonnes of rock and debris would be removed in the course of the excavation and Wyatt's team would have to sift through it all for artefacts. This was an Israeli Department of Antiquities requirement with which they would always comply. Ron and his team had begun a job of mammoth proportions.

Digging began along the escarpment, as planned, straight down. As the face of the cliff was exposed, a large, shelf-like niche was noticed, cut into the cliff-face. Further digging exposed two more niches cut into the cliff, and another smaller niche to their right. Their appearance suggested that they had been cut to hold plaques or signs. Wyatt's team was digging close to the Skull Face, a place that was known for its executions. As for the three niches, Wyatt hypothesised that they were for placing notices, stating the crime of the crucifixion victim, in the three languages of the day (Hebrew, Greek and Latin).

The exploration vicinity, Skull Hill, is believed by many to be the site of the most famous Crucifixion. Although not the objective of the excavation, Ron Wyatt sensed that they might find evidence to support this contention.

Removing more rubble, the men discovered that a shelf of bedrock extended out from the cliff-face by about 2.4 metres (eight feet). It appeared to be a platform. In the platform lay a large, squarish stone which appeared unnaturally symmetrical. With closer examination Wyatt discovered apparent finger-holds on the sides of the stone, allowing it to be grasped for removal.

Raising this stone revealed it to be a 'plug' covering a roughly square 'hole' chiselled into the bedrock. The hole was recessed to prevent the plug from falling all the way in, thus creating an effective lid. Completely empty, the hole had the appearance of a post-hole laboriously cut out of solid rock.

As the surrounding dirt was cleared away, a large crack was discovered extending out from the hole. The crack didn't appear to be man-made. Instead, it seemed more likely the result of an earth movement.

CRUCIFIXION SITE DISCOVERED

Digging was resumed in front of the platform into an area of packed earth. A lower level of bedrock was struck 1.2 metres (four feet) deeper. Once cleared, three more squarish holes were discovered chiselled into the lower bedrock in front of the platform. Wyatt believed that these holes were specially made to hold crucifixion crosses.

The elevated cross-hole was measured and found to extend 60 centimetres (23½ inches) into solid bedrock. It appeared that this was where the 'star attraction' was crucified, elevated several feet above those crucified around him.

Without doubt, the team had uncovered a crucifixion site. It was located on a ledge in front of a hill facing a public road. Could this be the actual site of the Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth? Biblical writings tell that this event took place near Skull Hill, the Place of the Skull—this very place.

EXCITEMENT AND TERROR IN THE TUNNELS

It was late 1980. The team had now been toiling for nearly two years. However, the object of their search continued to elude them. They had checked all along the cliff-face with no sign of a cave or tunnel, yet if the Ark were in that location at all it would surely be hidden in a cave.

Wyatt decided that the time had come to attempt to break through the cliff-face. To their delight they soon broke into a cavity inside the cliff. But initial excitement soon turned to drudgery. The cavern proved to be just a very small part of an extensive honeycomb of natural caves and tunnels inside the mountain. Each time that tunnels were discovered, they were disappointingly found to be empty.

December 1981 rolled on. One young local who had proven very honest and trustworthy was Rafat (not his real name). Being small and slender, this young man was a real help in squeezing through some of the impossibly tight tunnels of the excavations and reporting everything that he saw.

Ron and Rafat followed one particularly difficult passageway which led through a 'chimney' to connect with a tunnel so narrow that Ron had to exhale just to wriggle



The stone 'plug' found in a shelf of bedrock extending out from the cliff-face.

through. Emerging into a wider area, Ron saw a tiny opening in the wall of the passage. Directly in front of the hole was a stalactite about 40 centimetres (16 inches) long. It almost appeared to be guarding the hole.

Moments after Rafat was sent crawling through the tiny opening, he came tumbling back frantically, crying, "I'm not going back in there!" He was trembling and shaking and his eyes showed complete and utter terror—yet he claimed not to have seen anything. Whatever his experience, it was stark and real. He left the chamber and never returned.



The author, Jonathan Gray, with the stone 'plug'.



Ron Wyatt, exploring the narrow tunnels and caves inside Mount Moriah.

FAILED ATTEMPTS TO PHOTOGRAPH THE ARK

In the following years, Wyatt made several other trips back to the site, armed with cameras. If he couldn't retrieve the Ark of the Covenant, he could at least secure photographic evidence to confirm its existence.

He attempted to photograph the Ark by rigging up the camera to a long pole which he inserted through the opening at the top of the stone case. First, he used a Polaroid camera, but the photos turned out foggy. Next, he brought in a 35-mm camera, but again the photos turned out foggy. Finally he used a video camera, but still the images were fogged.

The photos were taken looking over the shoulder of one cherub toward the other. Unfortunately, in each attempt the developed image showed a strange effect. In front of the cherub (which Ron could see clearly) there was a 'supernatural' golden mist obscuring the view.

Being a religious man, Ron Wyatt concluded that he simply was not supposed to take any photographs.

THE ARK UNEARTHED

With Rafat's reaction still throbbing in his head, Ron Wyatt purposely checked his watch. The time was 2.00 pm; the date, Wednesday 6 January 1982.

With only 45 centimetres (18 inches) clearance, Ron lay on his stomach and inched forward with nothing but the flashlight in his hand. The beam of light shone forward over the huge pile of rocks; then something shiny caught his eye.

Ron began moving the rocks away, one at a time. It was slow, tedious work, but soon he found planks of dry-rotted wood just under the rocks. Beneath the planks he found the remains of animal skins so affected by dry rot that when he touched them they turned to powder.

The animal skins were laid over a golden table with raised moulding around its side. The decorative moulding depicted an alternating pattern of a bell and a pomegranate.

Ron's heart was racing. He knew that he was in a chamber with objects from King Solomon's Temple!

With adrenaline pumping through his veins and with mounting anticipation, Wyatt scanned the chamber with his torch, whereupon he noticed a crack in the ceiling with an accompanying deposit of a mysterious black substance.

Slowly and painfully, Ron crawled over the rocks to the other end of the chamber where he saw a stone case extending through the rocks. It was a thin-walled case, similar to those used in ancient times for storing objects.

The flat stone top was within eight to 10 centimetres (three to four inches) of the ceiling and it was cracked completely in two. Ron moved the smaller section of the cover, creating an opening into the stone case.

Although it was too close to the ceiling to look inside, he now knew what must be in that stone case. With that instant realisation, Ron passed out.

It was 2.45 pm when he came to, and only 45 minutes since he had entered the chamber.

Ron Wyatt did not report his experience to anyone at that time. His mind was whirring with all that had transpired. He needed time to think. The plan had always been to find the Ark of the Covenant and to retrieve it—but that now appeared to be an impossible task.

OFFICIAL ISRAELI RESPONSE TO THE DISCOVERY

Wyatt made several more trips into the chamber housing the Temple artefacts. He determined the chamber's dimensions to be 6.6 metres (22 feet) long and 3.6 metres wide (12 feet) at one end. One side follows the line of the cliff-face, narrowing the chamber in one corner. The height of the chamber is about 2.4 metres (eight feet), and the ceiling fairly flat.

Ron Wyatt eventually reported what he had found to the Israeli authorities. Perhaps not able to believe what he had told them, or perhaps recognising the problems that could arise were it to be made known, they asked him not to tell anyone about this discovery. Alas, it was too late, for Ron confessed that he had already told a few people. Realising that "what is done is done", they asked him not to reveal any more details than he had already shared. For this reason, the information that is presented from this point on cannot be too specific in certain areas, nor can some vital evidence be published.

Some time later, Wyatt was able to present the authorities with an artefact from the excavation. What he presented convinced them that he had indeed found some items from the First Temple.

In 1990, the Israeli authorities decided to test public reaction to an announcement of the 'possible discovery' of the Ark of the Covenant and to a 'possible building' of a new Temple. The result was a bloody clash and many deaths. The morning of Monday 8 October 1990 will survive in history as the Temple Mount Massacre. Eleven Israeli worshippers and eight policemen were injured, while 21 Arabs were shot dead and 125 seriously injured in a clash between Zionists and Arab Moslems.

Between Jewish extremists and nervous Moslems, the Ark of the Covenant is political dynamite.

THE STRANGE BLACK SUBSTANCE

On one of the later expeditions, Wyatt focused his attention on the two cracks in the chamber—one in the ceiling and one in the lid of the stone case—and found them to be in line. He had noticed the crack in the ceiling and its black substance deposit on his first visit to the cave. It almost seemed as if the crack had



The Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

come down through the rock and 'leapt through the air' to start again by splitting the lid of the stone case directly below.

The team began the detective work of investigating the extent of the crack in the ceiling. One team member sat up by the ledge outside and Wyatt entered the chamber to push a rigid metal tape up through the crack in the ceiling. The tape emerged on the left-hand side of the elevated cross-hole, making the crack a total of six metres (20 feet) through solid rock.

To add to the mystery, it appeared that some of the black substance had run down the ceiling crack leading from the cross-hole and had dripped through the gap in the stone lid, landing inside the stone case. Some of the substance had also splashed onto the lid of the case. Wyatt took samples of this black substance for later analysis.

THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT?

Preliminary testing of these deposit samples taken from the crack leading from the cross-hole has shown the substance to be human blood.

Ron Wyatt's theory is that it is the blood of Christ that was copiously spilled when the Roman soldier thrust his spear into Yeshua (Jesus) to confirm that he was dead on the cross.

Biblical history records that at 3.00 pm, when Jesus died, an earthquake struck. Was this the cause of the crack?

If it can ever be proved that this mysterious black substance is the blood of Jesus, this would mean that His was the last blood to be spilled on the Mercy Seat (lid) of the Ark of the Covenant. In every sense of the original Hebrew belief in the sacrificial system, this would indeed make this the last sacrifice, and would be consistent with prophecies that the Messiah would be the final sacrifice. (In ancient times, the blood of a sacrifice was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat once a year.)

Tests on the retrieved samples are ongoing and are proving very interesting for they may well confirm early indications that this substance is the blood of man born of a "virgin birth". This may not be so outlandish considering the report in *New Scientist* magazine (7 October 1995) about a three-year-old boy's blood cells containing only female X chromosomes. This is an important development for Christians who believe that Jesus was born of only one parent, the Virgin Mary.

Again, if Ron had not found the Crucifixion site with the crack in the cross-hole, the link between the blood and the Crucifixion might never have been made.

If conclusive evidence is found to link the Ark of the Covenant and the Crucifixion site, it would mean that the prophet Jeremiah concealed the Ark in exactly the right location some 600 years earlier.

TUNNEL SEARCH ABANDONED

Ron Wyatt has pursued his search for the original access tunnel since 1982 and has followed many leads. He and his team have used sub-surface interface radar to search for voids crossing from the Old City to the excavation. They have followed hopeful trails, only to be met with disappointing rock barriers.

In 1992, in desperation, Ron even attempted to reach the cavern by digging straight down from above with pneumatic hammer drills. Unfortunately, over several trips to the site, he and the team had managed only to get through three metres (10 feet) of solid limestone and incur thousands of dollars in expenses, so they abandoned the attempt.

THE WORLD'S MOST EXPLOSIVE ARTEFACT

I am now often asked, "How do the Israeli authorities react to the find?"

Speaking frankly, from the information I am able to acquire it is evident that the authorities do not know how to handle this discovery. They have a right to be nervous.

Some time ago, an Israeli team was granted a permit to undertake an excavation under the Temple Mount. After a short while it was reported that workmen had been seen lugging crates into the excavation tunnel. This aroused the curiosity of the authorities who sent in men to investigate. They found that the tunnel penetrated to a spot close underneath the Dome of the Rock—and high explosives were being set in position, presumably to blow up the place.

If you didn't know, the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, together named the Haram al-Sharif, comprise the third most important place in the world for the Moslem people. Just think what sabotage of that site could do; it might well provoke an Islamic *jihad* , a "holy war".

The Israeli Government claims that it wants to maintain good relations with the Moslem people and does not want to disturb the peace. However, both Jews and Moslems lay claim to the Temple Mount, but some Israelis want to demolish the Moslem Dome of the Rock to build a Third Temple on the site. Possession of the Ark could encourage extremists to wage war in order to achieve this aim. The Ark of the Covenant would be the most coveted item for such a Temple.

So we have Jewish extremists, angry Moslems, and a third potentially explosive factor: the Ark of the Covenant find.

The *US News and World Report* put it well: "In a land torn by competing historical claims, archaeology is a weapon."

While the authorities (and by this I mean a handful of tight-lipped officials) know of the Ark's location, they have decided that the matter is too politically volatile for them to go public. An

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official announcement could provoke action by fringe groups wanting to build a new Temple. Government officials regard this as a critical issue in which the safety of the people must come first.

In view of the prospects of a negotiable peace in the Middle East, the present actions of the Israeli Government are deliberately against any disclosure of what it knows. Perhaps sensing the imminent recovery of the Ark of the Covenant, the government has denied permission for its recovery at this time.

THE ARK STAYS UNDERGROUND

When the authorities ordered Wyatt and his crew to seal up the entrance to the excavation tunnel leading to the chamber, we knew that absolute confirmation of the Ark of the Covenant's discovery would be impossible for the present.

Workmen constructed a steel door to close off the entrance and piled several feet of earth over it to disguise the location. They covered over the cross-holes with timber and gravel, since the authorities did not want these revealed.

No matter how wonderful and exciting would be the display of the items in that cave, it seems that this will have to wait a while longer.

Meanwhile, with the weight of accumulated evidence, public pressure needs to be applied to politicians internationally to reverse the Israeli Government's stance. Why should this discovery be kept underground for another decade?

EPILOGUE

The story that has just been revealed is as much as can be told at this time. With strong initial scepticism, I have spent five years since 1991 investigating Ron Wyatt's claims and I have been privileged to view evidence that cannot be shared publicly at this time. After becoming convinced of the truth of Ron's claims, I assisted him with his exploration and research.

For many people, the evidence that *can* be offered now is more than enough. Others can only wait and watch until the ultimate evidence can be presented.

(Readers with computers may care to chase up Jonathan Gray's excellent CD-ROM entitled "Ark of the Covenant". See opposite column for contact details. Ed.)

About the Author:

Jonathan Gray is an explorer who has spent over 30 years travelling to archaeological sites worldwide to gather data on ancient mysteries. His expeditions have taken him to the Amazon headwaters in Ecuador where he found Egyptian artefacts; to a remote Pacific island in search of giant hominid remains; to Turkey on the quest for Noah's Ark; to Israel to discover the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah; and the Red Sea, to find the remains of the Egyptian Pharaoh's army from which Moses escaped.

Gray has authored nine books, including *The Ark Conspiracy* (about the search for Noah's Ark) and *Ark of the Covenant* (1997), and has also produced/presented the video series, *Surprising Discoveries*. Based in Adelaide, South Australia, he lectures internationally.

Note:

Copies of Jonathan Gray's book, *Ark of the Covenant*, can be obtained as follows:

Australia—PO Box 3370, Rundle Mall, SA 5000, ph (08) 8398 3862 (\$24.95 + p&h);

New Zealand—PO Box 148, Rangiora, phone (03) 313 8908 (NZD\$30.00);

UK—PO Box 14540, Dunfermline KY12 9ZD, ph/fax 01383 852863 (£16.00+ p&h);

USA—PO Box 632, Thorsby, AL 35171, phone (205) 646 3290 (USD\$30.00 + p&h).